

ART IN THE USA: 300 Years of Innovation

Guggenheim, Bilbao October 11, 2007 – February 3, 2008



Deputy Chief of Mission Hugo Llorens with the Mayor of Bilbao, Iñaki Azkuna Urreta, October 2007

U.S. Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission's Visit to Bilbao

During a visit to Bilbao on October 10 and 11, Chargé d'Affaires Hugo Llorens highlighted the strong economic ties between Spain and the United States and promoted the benefits of investing in renewable energy technologies. In a speech to a group of prominent Basque business leaders the Chargé outlined the U.S. strategy for addressing global climate change and encouraged Spain to continue developing and investing in clean energy technologies. In addition, the Chargé held a breakfast with IVLP alumni to exchange views with them on US-Spain bilateral issues. **He was also in Bilbao to represent the Embassy at the opening of the exhibit "Art in the USA: 300 Years of Innovation" and**

attend a gala dinner at the Guggenheim Museum. The exhibit opening received excellent press coverage in all major Spanish newspapers. During a morning interview with Radio Euskadi (250,000 listeners) the Chargé answered questions about the US-Spain bilateral relationship, US policy in Iraq, terrorism and the US electoral process. Charge also met with the Mayor of Bilbao, Iñaki Azkuna Urreta.



Co-organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the Terra Foundation for American Art, this exhibition will feature a compelling selection of approximately 200 artworks culled from a range of private and public collections in the United States. The exhibition will be shown in four venues, two of which will be in China (Beijing and Shanghai) and will be the most significant display of American Art ever exhibited in China. The third location will be Moscow and the fourth the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

Divided into six historical periods, the exhibition will demonstrate how the art of each era both reflected and contributed to a complex visual narrative of a nation during times of discovery, growth and experimentation.

Kicking off on October 11, "Art in the USA: 300 Years of Innovation," will showcase more than 250 compelling works by noted American artists from public and private collections in the U.S. and will be the most significant display of American art ever presented in Spain. The show, which will run through February 3, 2008, will be divided into six historical periods, tracing the evolution of American art through three centuries and demonstrating how the art of each era both

reflected and contributed to a complex visual narrative of a nation during times of discovery, growth and experimentation.

Co-organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the Terra Foundation for American Art, "Art in the USA: 300 Years of Innovation" was shown in Beijing, Shanghai and Moscow earlier this year.

The exhibition

The exhibition, which premiered in Beijing at the National Art Museum of China from February 10 to April 5, 2007, was organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, and the Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago. Drawn from several dozen museums and collections in Europe and America, the exhibition presents approximately 160 works by nearly as many artists who hold an important place in America's art history, and systematically outlines the developments of the last 300 years, from the colonial period of the 18th century to the present. For the Shanghai presentation, a new contemporary section has been added to the exhibition—*Art in America: Now*—which will be mounted at MoCA Shanghai. Following its presentation in Shanghai, the exhibition traveled to Moscow to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the start of diplomatic relations between Russia and the U.S., and to Bilbao, as part of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao's tenth anniversary celebrations.

President George H.W. Bush serves as Honorary Chair of the Honorary Committee for the exhibition. Joining him on the Honorary Committee are Honorary Vice Chairs: The Honorable and Mrs. Clark T. Randt, U.S. Ambassador to China; The Honorable Sun Jiazheng, Minister of Culture, P.R.C.; and The Honorable Zhou Wenzhong, Ambassador of the P.R.C. to the U.S.

This exhibition has been organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, in partnership with the Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago.

Exhibition Overview

Divided into six historical periods, *Art in America: Three Hundred Years of Innovation* demonstrates how the art of each era both reflected and contributed to a complex visual narrative of the nation during times of discovery, growth, and experimentation. The exhibition explores issues of identity, creation, innovation, and scale—characteristics integral to the American consciousness and derived in part from the variety and vastness of the cultural, political, ethnic, economic, and natural landscapes of the United States. The six sections, each marking significant phases of the country's development, are: Colonization and Rebellion (1700–1830), Expansion and Fragmentation (1830–80), Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism (1880–1915), Modernism and Regionalism (1915–45), Prosperity and Disillusionment (1945–80), and Multiculturalism and Globalization (1980–present). The historical exhibition at the Shanghai Museum features over 120 artists from the early 18th century to the present and includes, among many others: John Singleton Copley, Benjamin West, Charles Willson Peale, Gilbert Stuart, George Catlin, Frederic Edwin Church, Edward Hicks, Winslow Homer, Martin Johnson Heade, John Singer Sargent, Albert Bierstadt, Mary Cassatt, Childe Hassam, Frederic Remington, Marsden Hartley, Robert Henri, George Bellows, Charles Demuth, Georgia O'Keeffe, Stuart Davis, Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Brice Marden, Chuck Close, Lawrence Weiner, Richard Prince, Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Jeff Koons.

The exhibit enables an expanded display of current developments in American art with works and installations by Matthew Barney, Paul Chan, Adam Cvijanovic, Tom Friedman, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Hammons, Jonathan Horowitz, Glenn Ligon, Cady Noland, Erick Swenson, Nam June Paik, Paul Pfeiffer, Jack Pierson, Tom Sachs, Kara Walker, Kelley Walker, and Roger Welch. *Art in America: Now* also presents a diverse selection of contemporary photography, including works by Kristin Baker, Miles Coolidge, Sharon Core, Tim Davis, Luis Gispert, Katy Grannan, Justine Kurland, Nikki S. Lee, Anthony Lepore, Laura McPhee, Dana Schutz, Kehinde Wiley, and Charlie White, among others. San Francisco-based street artist Barry McGee will create a site-specific work exclusively for Shanghai MoCA, conveying the vibrancy and boundary-crossing of contemporary American art.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

Founded in 1937, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation is dedicated to promoting the understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, and other manifestations of visual culture, primarily of the modern and contemporary periods, and to the collection, conservation, and study of the art of our time. The Foundation realizes this mission through exceptional exhibitions, education programs, research initiatives, and publications, and strives to engage and educate an increasingly

diverse international audience through its unique network of museums and cultural partnerships. Currently the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation owns and operates three museums: the Guggenheim Museum on Fifth Avenue, New York City; the Peggy Guggenheim Collection on the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy; and the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum in Las Vegas. The Foundation also provides programming and management for two other museums in Europe that bear its name, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, and the Deutsche Guggenheim, in Berlin. Through a unique alliance agreement, the Guggenheim Foundation shares its collections and collaborates on programming with the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

Since 1996, when the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation collection was shown at the Shanghai Museum as one of the first exhibitions of modern Western art in China, the Guggenheim's commitment to China has been central to its identity and strategy as a global cultural institution. In 1998, the Guggenheim presented *China: 5000 Years*, an unprecedented masterpiece survey of Chinese art, archeology, and culture from ancient to modern periods, drawn from China's major museums and organized in cooperation with the P.R.C. Ministry of Culture. Recently, the museum established a curatorial position for Asian art, the first within a modern and contemporary art museum in the west. In 2008, the Guggenheim Museum will present the first museum retrospective of the work of contemporary Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang.

Terra Foundation for American Art

The Terra Foundation for American Art is committed to fostering innovative projects that emphasize multinational perspectives and participation. Throughout its 27-year history, the Terra Foundation has supported exhibitions, scholarship, and educational programs designed to engage individuals around the globe in an enriched and enriching dialogue on American art. The Terra Foundation's collection of American art spans the colonial era through 1945, and includes more than seven hundred works. Currently, the Terra Foundation operates the Musée d'Art Américain Giverny; actively lends works in its collection to national and international exhibitions that advance American art scholarship; awards grants to exhibitions and programs that explore American art in Europe, Canada, Latin America, and now, Asia; and supports scholars through residential fellowships at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, as well as through travel grants offered through the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, the John-F.-Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien in Berlin, and l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art in Paris.

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. The building



Designed by the North American architect Frank O. Gehry, this unique Museum built on a 32,500 square meter site in the center of Bilbao represents an amazing construction feat. On one side it runs down to the waterside of the Nervión River, 16 meters below the level of the rest of the city of Bilbao. One end is pierced through by the huge Puente de La Salve, one of the main access routes into the city.

The perfect setting: architecture for art's sake

The building itself is an extraordinary combination of interconnecting shapes. Orthogonal blocks in limestone contrast with curved and bent forms covered in titanium. Glass curtain walls provide the building with the light and transparency it needs. Owing to their mathematical complexity, the sinuous stone, glass, and titanium curves were designed with the aid of computers. The glass walls were made and installed to protect the works of art from heat and radiation. The half-millimeter thick "fish-scale" titanium panels covering most of the building are guaranteed to last one hundred years. As a whole, Gehry's design creates a spectacular, eminently visible structure that has the presence of a huge sculpture set against the backdrop of the city.

A new urban center

People coming from the calle Iparraguirre, one of the main streets bisecting the center of Bilbao diagonally, are led directly to the main entrance; the idea was to bring the city right to the doors of the building. A broad flight of steps takes pedestrians down to the Museum hall although descending flights of stairs are not a frequent feature of institutional buildings. This is an inspired response to the differences in height between the level of the river and the level of the city center. It also enables a building with a surface area of 24,000 square meters and more than 50 meters high to be slotted into the city landscape without it towering over the neighboring buildings.

A city within another

Visitors passing through the hall to the exhibition areas come immediately to the atrium, the real heart of the Museum and one of the most idiosyncratic features of Gehry's design, which has a sort of metal flower skylight at the top that allows a stream of light to illuminate the warm, inviting space. From the Atrium, the visitor is given the opportunity to access a terrace covered by a canopy supported by a single stone pillar. The canopy serves a function (better appreciated perhaps from the other bank of the river, which offers observers an excellent view of the entire rear façade of the Museum) that is both protective and aesthetic at one and the same time. The broad flight of stairs that goes up to the sculptural tower, conceived as a device to absorb and integrate the Puente de La Salve into the overall architectural scheme of the building, is also a public access way that connects pedestrians with the rest of the city.

Exhibition galleries are organized on three levels around the central atrium and are connected by a system of curving walkways suspended from the roof, glass elevators and stair turrets. All in all, a spectacular vision that one critic has described as a metaphorical city, where the panels of glass that cover the elevator-well evoke the scales of a fish that leaps and spins, the walkways that climb the interior walls are like vertical motorways, and the plaster curves crowning the atrium suggest the molded ribbing of a drawing by Willem de Kooning. In short, a glimpse of artifice in architectural design taken to its uttermost limits.

The space of art

Eleven thousand square meters of exhibition space are distributed in 19 galleries. Ten of these galleries have an almost classical orthogonal look and can be identified from outside by their stone finishes. Nine other, irregularly-shaped galleries present a remarkable contrast, and can be identified from outside by their unusual architecture and the covering of titanium. By playing with volumes and perspectives, these galleries provide huge interior spaces that somehow manage not to overwhelm the visitor. Large-scale artworks are housed in an exceptional 30 meter wide, 130 meter long gallery free of columns and with flooring specially prepared to cope with the comings and going of visitors and museum staff, as well as the sheer weight of the works on display there. Seen from the outside, this gallery slides underneath the Puente de La Salve and runs up against the end of the tower that embraces the bridge and brings it into the building.

There is a harmonious tie between the architectural shapes and the contents of each gallery. Undoubtedly, this simplifies the tour inside the Museum while the atrium, in its very center, and the walkways that link one gallery with another - showing different perspectives of the exhibitional spaces - facilitate the location of galleries and services at any time. As visitors enter the Museum they learn that under the external complex appearance of the architectural shapes, there lies a neat, clear world where it is easy to find one's way around.

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